

## The Unkind Friend

As we read through these precious words of scripture, we find that God will present Himself to us, His character, His nature, His ways, and His Will in many different manners and forms. Sometimes, it will be in a simple description that we can easily understand. But at other times, He presents Himself within a “parable”, or within an “analogy” or in “metaphors” or “allegories”.

And we find ourselves having to be very careful that we grasp the intended meaning of His words lest we'll become confused and think thoughts about Him and have beliefs about Him that aren't exactly right.

And such can be so as we read this portion of scripture before us today. Unless and until we have the Holy Spirit of God abiding within us to help us to interpret these precious words rightly, we'll have difficulty understanding God's heart and His Will in circumstances like these.

And that was especially so for Jesus' disciples as they walked daily with Him and observed His behaviors and learned His teachings. These disciples would be the ones who would carry His truths on forward, both during their days on this earth, and also through their giving of these gospels to readers like you and me throughout the ages.

Turn with me to Luke chapter 11 and read along with me beginning in verse 5.

<sup>5</sup>And He (the Lord Jesus) said to them, “Which of you shall have a friend, and go to him at midnight and say to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves; <sup>6</sup>for a friend of mine has come to me on his journey, and I have nothing to set before him’; <sup>7</sup>and he will answer from within and say, ‘Do not trouble me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give to you’? <sup>8</sup>I say to you, though he will not rise and give to him because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will rise and give him as many as he needs. (Luke 11:5-8)

As I read words such as these, it becomes so apparent that the humility of God is far beyond any measure I will ever be able to comprehend. As He attends to our needs by giving us guidance and instruction, He never seems to concern Himself with how we might receive them, how we might misunderstand His motives and prejudge Him for the things he does. He simply puts forth His truth, and He does what He does, and then allows it all to stand on its own merit.

And real truth can do that. Real truth, the truth of God can stand on its own, without error and without excuse. His truth is so perfect and so absolutely right that no opposition and no amount of misunderstanding can deter its purpose. And just because God's truth does not fit well into our neatly arranged principles and philosophies, that does not nullify its validity.

Our struggle to accept and to agree with God's truth is never on God's side of the equation. Rather, our struggle is with us, on our side of the equation, with our weak and meager ability to comprehend and to trust the plans and the nature of God.

Sometimes, God will present Himself to us as being an "unjust Judge" who does not quickly honor the petition of a helpless widow. At other times, as here in our scripture passage that we're studying today, He appears to be an unkind friend who seems not to want to help a friend who pleads for His help. But folks, God is never truly unjust or unkind!

May I quickly read the parable about the "unjust judge", and as I do, listen carefully for the "deeper meaning" that Jesus intends within His words.

<sup>1</sup>And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. <sup>2</sup>He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. <sup>3</sup>And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, 'Give me justice against my adversary.' <sup>4</sup>For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, 'Though I neither fear God nor respect man, <sup>5</sup>yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.' " <sup>6</sup>And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge says. <sup>7</sup>And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? <sup>8</sup>I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" (Luke 18:1-8)

May I pause here for a moment and again assure us that God is never, Himself, unjust or unkind. I say this because too often, the world, the flesh and the devil will accuse God of being unkind and unjust. And at times, even we as believers can become frustrated with God because He doesn't provide for us in the way that we think that He should. And at other times, He will allow the free will behavior of wicked men to do awful things that we don't like and that we don't

understand. But we must have the faith to trust that God Himself is never unkind and He Himself is never unjust. It is never His nature to be so.

Notice first in these words of our passage that Jesus is still teaching His disciples about "prayer". Recall that in the verses of scripture that we have just finished studying, the disciples had asked Jesus to teach them how to pray. And these words are a continuation of that teaching.

In both of those parables, the parable of the widow before the "unjust judge", and in this parable of the "unkind friend", God is giving us a simple, but profound truth. And that truth is that there will nearly always be a necessity for persistence and diligence when we seek His help and favor . . . a process that will not only benefit the one we are praying for, but will also serve to draw you and me, the petitioners, on forward into a deeper, more trusting faith.

The illustration in this parable of the "unkind friend" presents us with a man, a good man, who has a friend stopping by on a journey. And knowing that he has nothing to set before his friend, the man goes to another friend to ask for bread to feed his visitor.

This first man who has come to his friend at night for bread represents you and me. And the circumstance represents all of the normal daily occasions of life. We are most often so absorbed with meeting our own daily needs that we are caught unawares when an unexpected friend arrives and needs help.

Secondly in this illustration, is the friend on the journey! He represents all those loved ones that we encounter throughout our day, our wife, our husband, our son or daughter, our co-workers, our neighbor and on and on, those many, many people that we rub shoulders with during our day. And our usual fare of self-absorbed opinions and ideas will not feed their hungry souls as they express their needs to us.

The third friend in this illustration, the man in the house is God. And while His response does not at first seem kind and helpful, as I mentioned a moment ago, God is never unkind. He is always good, all of the time. In Psalm 119, we are told that, "God is good and He doeth good". And He is very Wise!

God simply uses most every circumstance and moment of life as a "teachable moment". And it is our charge to always be ready to receive His instruction.

And that is so with this illustration. God really does have everything that we will need for all those who come to us. And as His dearly beloved sons and daughters, we can be confident that He will supply all that we need to help them.

But we need to also understand and accept that God's blessings are usually intended to accomplish more than one purpose at a time. His blessings can reverberate out in many directions, and especially back to you and me, the petitioners, so that as we help others, our own souls grow in trusting faith.

Let's look again at this parable. In its simplest form, it is addressing you and me. We are the ones who encounter friends on a journey. Such things are always taking place, every day and we need to be prepared for it, friends and family members stopping by our house, others at our desk in the office, others while shopping at the store.

And we need to be prepared for those occasions. And no, our preparation is not to keep studied up on answers to every question, but rather to know instantly to whom we must appeal for our answers.

And we need to always know that the usual "bread" that we have to set before them, our personal opinions and our philosophies are not the bread that our friends need. And we need to always know that while we might like to imagine ourselves as being open and objective with our thoughts and ideas, that is almost never so.

Every thought, every idea, every principle, every philosophy that we advocate has our emotions and our sinful nature intertwined within it. It is the way of all men and women.

Too often, we are tempted to simply join in with our friend in their dilemma, complaining and commiserating with them in their troubles, but that is not what they really need from us. God admonishes us to first be "Slow to speak, slow to anger and quick to listen". If we are faithful to do that, then God can have His opportunity to intervene within our thoughts.

Our first response must be that of humility, to know that our friend is in need and we have nothing to set before them. Yes, the bread that we offer from ourselves might suffice for the day, but it will not usually bring lasting satisfaction.

I think of the advice that is often given to friends who are experiencing problems in their marriages. Friends too often sympathize with their friends. Yes, their friend has been mistreated by their husband or wife, but retaliation is never God's answer to a marriage problem.

And also, there is usually never a "quick answer" to a friend's marriage problems. By the time they are talking with you and me about their problems, there has often been a multitude of wrong responses taking place, by all parties involved.

And perhaps that is one of the reasons for and the implications of the delay that the friend in the house provides. While in this parable, the friend in the house might give the appearance of not wanting to help, delay can often bring far better results than quick fixes.

Thankfully, as I mentioned a moment ago, in this parable, our friend in the house is no ordinary friend. He is God and He has some intended purposes in temporarily withholding His answer to our request.

And here the answer about the delay is clearly given. And we can see from the answer that God again is working for the benefit of everyone involved, both the friend on the journey and the friend that is making the petition. Here God tells us in verse 8,

<sup>8</sup>I say to you, though he will not rise and give to him because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will rise and give him as many as he needs.(Luke 11:8)

In these words, God is asking us to go beyond the surface of our ordinary understanding, and to know that there are occasions when the needs of our friends require more than just friendship. They might need "wisdom", "wisdom" beyond our normal capacity. And we need to be prepared to know the difference and to know where to go for that wisdom.

And also in these words, God is giving us an understanding of the necessity for "persistence" in our prayers. Yes, all of us want immediate answers to our cries

for help, but there is often much more to be accomplished within people's souls before a complete answer can be given.

I think about the many years that you and I have spent on our knees in prayer for our children and other loved ones. We plead daily with God for the "bread" that will feed their souls and bring them to salvation, but the answer most often does not come quickly. And we continue in prayer for many years.

And that is what God wants us to do, to be persistent, to persevere, and to never give up. Why is God delaying in His answer? We know that God is omnipotent and all-knowing, that He could with no effort at all save our loved one, but He doesn't, not immediately.

I have come to believe that the delay is most likely because our loved one is continually resisting God's Holy Spirit. Or perhaps some other similar "free will" problem is taking place.

And again, we must not allow ourselves to become discouraged by the delay. We need to continually remind ourselves that God truly is good all of the time and that the delay is needful as He carries forward His plan and His purpose for our loved one.

Our task in prayer is simply to fully trust God and His character, and to know that His plan and His purpose is far better than the one we would prefer.

Folks, "free will" is a necessary part of the equation. As much as we might like for God to simply force our loved ones to turn to Him, or as much as we might want God to force that husband or wife to return to their marriage vows, He often does not. It might violate His holiness to force on past a person's free will in such matters.

And so, we see the need for the delay and we see the need for our patience and our persistence in prayer. And we must never give up.

Before we close out our thoughts on this parable of Jesus, let's consider a view of the friend inside the house from one more perspective. Considering this same analogy, God along with His beloved Son and His Holy Spirit, and all His heavenly family were very comfortable in heaven, until we came along.

And we, and our needful friends on our daily journeys of life can't help ourselves. We have a special need that only the "Bread of God" can satisfy.

And listen, it's because of our persistent need that God disrupted His household and gave us His only begotten Son, the Living Bread of Life, so that we might live.

So then, again, as you and I have friends who come to us each day who are in need of our help, what are we to do?

Firstly, our response is to humbly realize that we truly do not have the bread they need to feed their hungry souls. Our homespun advice and counsel will not help them.

We instead need to immediately go to our friend in the house, God Himself, and plead with Him to give us His True Bread of life. And that is the "Bread" that we should give to them. And then, we need to be willing to settle in and be patient.

Marriage problems do not get resolved overnight. Relationships do not get restored quickly. Forgiveness is often a struggle. And salvation does not come easily to an unrepentant and resistant heart. It takes time and patience and persistent prayer. And we must never give up.

I'll close with these words of truth from Romans 12.

<sup>9</sup>Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. <sup>10</sup>Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. <sup>11</sup>Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. <sup>12</sup>Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. <sup>13</sup>Share with God's people who are in need. (Romans 12:9-13)

Let's pray.